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On Herman Kahn

For a patriotic nuclear strategist, Herman Kahn has been treated rather harshly by Hollywood. His public personality was used in "Fail-Safe" to symbolize the bloodless, civilian defense thinker who calculates megadeaths. And Stanley Kubrick had Peter Sellers extol the Kahnian concept of a Doomsday Machine in "Dr. Strangelove."

The rotund 43-year-old Kahn, a former Rand Corporation analyst who now heads his own think factory, the Hudson Institute, Inc., adopts a benign attitude toward his satirical detractors. "I didn't see the movie and I just skimmed the book," he says of "Fail-Safe," "but my wife said if the character people say was me weighed more than 220 pounds she'd sue." As for the mad Dr. Strangelove, Kahn says he enjoyed the film, and added that "Kubrick is a friend of mine—he told me Dr. Strangelove wasn't supposed to be me." Kahn is more sensitive to the serious criticisms of his books, notably the pioneering treatises "On Thermonuclear War" and "Thinking About the Unthinkable." "Most people," he says almost plaintively, "didn't realize the O.T.W. is a left-wing book; it discusses war but it doesn't recommend it."

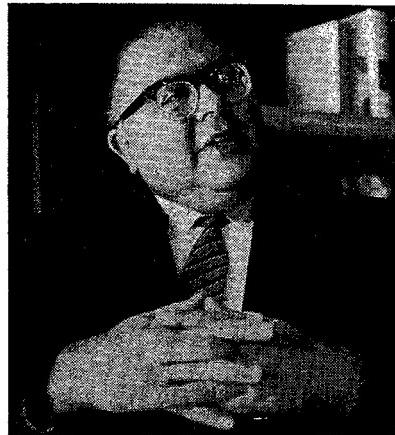
44-Rung Ladder: Kahn's odd brand of liberalism strongly colors his latest book, "On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios" (308 pages. *Frederick A. Praeger*. \$6.95), a searching exploration of modern nuclear strategy. In a series of dispassionate scenarios describing American and Communist moves and countermoves, Kahn explores the 44 rungs on the escalation ladder leading to oblivion. In Kahn's view, the Gulf of Tonkin action in the summer of 1964 qualified only as Rung 1—an example

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of the first form of Subcrisis Maneuvering. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 occupies Rung 9, or Dramatic Military Confrontations—three removed from the Korean-style Large Conventional War (Rung 12), and still comfortably far down from Rung 44 or Spasm War.

One recent morning in Washington, Kahn talked to an interviewer about U.S. military and foreign policy. He had given classified briefings to a Defense intelligence meeting and a group of service chiefs at the Pentagon, and now, relaxing, he perched his bulk on a chair in his motel room. "Our intervention policy should be more austere—we must respect the right of other people to choose their governments," Kahn began. "After all, the choice can be as irrelevant to us as the War of the Roses." For this reason, Kahn thinks the U.S. should not have involved itself in the Dominican Republic.

Kahn discounts the possibility that Vietnam will escalate into nuclear war (sample "scenarios" below). But his vision of the future is less optimistic. "There will probably be a small nuclear war in the next 35 years," says Kahn.



Newsweek—Phil MacMullan

Kahn: Detached

He does not make predictions about where or when the war will occur but he thinks it may be caused by what he terms America's lack of concern for underdeveloped countries ("We are like the poker player who has won all the chips and wants to leave the game") and the spread of nuclear weapons.

Kahn is also pessimistic about devoting the research efforts of his Hudson In-

stitute to disarmament studies. "Peace research," says Kahn, "does not carry much conviction because people do not believe it practical to change the system, therefore it is hard to get support for it." The only alternative is a grim one: "We must study how to keep future wars as non-destructive as possible."

"The ideas we deal with are simple, and we make them even simpler," he explains. "I've asked both generals and grandmothers what they would do in a particular strategic situation and they both give the same answers."

Kahn grants that the language in which strategic thinking is expressed—devastation-attacks insurance, catalytic war, controlled reciprocal reprisal, escalation spectrum and others—sounds alien to laymen but he contends that the words developed naturally ("Surf riders and handball players use jargon too"). For all his resolution, however, Kahn admits that he sometimes finds thinking about the unthinkable depressing. "I have to adopt a detached attitude, like a doctor," Kahn concludes. "A doctor doesn't keep a picture of a patient's wife and kids in front of him."

VIETNAM SCENARIOS

I. MORE OF THE SAME. The U.S. steadily enlarges its ground combat commitment but its hopes are frustrated; there is no conclusion to the war in sight. The Saigon government is affected by internal struggles for power and experiences attempted coups; its international credit is slight; and the non-Communist political and communal elements in Vietnam are still engaged in acrimonious rivalries. The South Vietnamese Army fights well in some actions, especially the special units and the mercenaries, but the mass of the army is of indifferent effectiveness. The defection rate is high, many units are infiltrated by Viet Cong agents, and officers tend to be unenthusiastic and unaggressive. U.S. bombing continues; military and economic targets in and near Hanoi are hit but civilian centers are avoided. North Vietnam and China carefully avoid overt involvements, and North Vietnam receives extensive Chinese and Soviet economic support to compensate for the bomb damage. The result, by the end of 1965, is a heavy U.S. involvement in troops and prestige with the seeming U.S. alternatives being: a still heavier troop commitment—probably comparable to the U.S. commitment in the Korean War—with a view to "conquest" and occupation of most of the Vietnamese countryside, a withdrawal on fairly humiliating terms, or continua-

To help think about the unthinkable, Herman Kahn and his colleagues spin off scenarios plotting the possible course of a conflict. Kahn says he can cook up two dozen on Vietnam—given time. Here, for Newsweek, are three typical scenarios:

tion of a frustrating and expensive "colonial" war.

II. A MUTUAL DISASTER. North Vietnamese troops disguised as Viet Cong launch heavy attacks on several U.S. positions in South Vietnam. Chinese troops move across the Vietnamese border and take up reserve positions in North Vietnam. U.S. air units step up their campaign in North Vietnam. More marines and infantry are landed; a major ground campaign develops. But initially, in part due to mistakes by the U.S. military leadership, the U.S. loses some battles. The Chinese then send their troops south, hoping to exploit the situation. The U.S. regroups, comes back, and, exploiting obvious Chinese logistic weaknesses, launches a successful campaign. A stable front eventually is established along the North Vietnamese-Chinese border. The United States meanwhile bombs Red China, accepting high losses in this bombing. There are heavy pressures on United States decision-makers to authorize the use of small nuclear weapons. This pressure is resisted. Eventually the war is settled by negotiation, with the United States being forced to occupy Vietnam for five years and finally leaving a U.S.-sponsored military dictatorship...

III. U.S.-SOVIET CONFRONTATION. The United States continues bombing North Vietnam. The Soviets

decide to send technicians and air-defense troops to North Vietnam. The United States does not interfere with this Soviet reinforcement of North Vietnam, but it does attack the air-defense installations and, while accepting high losses, keeps them suppressed. The Soviet effort is increased and various East European states begin to make contributions. There is some "heating up" of the cold war. The Soviets begin to increase their potential defense establishment, reinforce and modernize their units in East Germany, and bring the Warsaw pact up to a war footing. There are rumors of an intense confrontation between Brezhnev and one or more East European Communist leaders, but there are indications of a general tightening of political discipline within the bloc. The Chinese also begin again to cooperate with the Soviets, and the Chinese press speaks of the need for socialist solidarity in this crisis. To some small degree the cold war has returned to the degrees of tension characteristic of the early '50s, including some mollifying of the Sino-Soviet conflict; but there is no real rapprochement between the two, only a decrease in mutual hostility. However, the Soviets now begin to take a more active role in the defense of North Vietnam, simultaneously hinting at counter-escalations against the West elsewhere in the world...